

MEADOW VALLEY RANGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 185,744 acres

The Meadow Valley Range Wilderness Study Area (WSA), NV-050-156, is located in Lincoln County except for approximately two miles of the southernmost end located in Clark County. The south end of the WSA is about fifty-five miles northeast of Las Vegas. The WSA contains approximately 185,744 acres of public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management with no split estate or private or state inholdings.

The eastern WSA boundary is the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way, private lands, west edge of the County road or the centerline of the stream in the Meadow Valley Wash. This wash is also the western boundary of the Mormon Mountains WSA (NV-050-161). Along the north side of the Meadow Valley Range WSA, the boundary follows a jeep trail to Avertt Reservoir, then cross-country to another jeep trail on the northwestern-tip. The west boundary is a series of peak to peak lines and ridges along the base of the mountains until it comes to the Aerojet lands where it shares a common border. The southern boundary cuts cross-country until it reaches Dead Man's Wash, thence up this drainage, across its divide into Farrier Wash which it follows to its intersection with Meadow Valley Wash.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 97,180 acres recommended for wilderness 88,564 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate approximately 97,180 acres as wilderness and release approximately 88,564 acres for uses other than wilderness. The area recommended for wilderness designation is natural, provides outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and provides better protection for solitude-dependent wildlife. The wilderness integrity of this area can be retained with minimal management because of the extremely rugged topography. Approximately thirty-four miles of jumbled, remote and extremely varied ridges stretch from one end of this area to the other precluding vehicular access. As a result, the area has remained very natural. Because of the area's size and precipitous topography along the western edge, solitude is outstanding. Steep cliffs, jagged peaks and hidden narrow canyons provide interesting places to explore. Conical buff-based Sunflower Mountain sits astride the main ridgeline, a visual focal point from great distances. The northernmost part of the area is forested with pinyon and juniper trees providing relief from continuous low desert shrub vegetation. This portion of the area also contains an attractive natural arch. Outstanding photographic opportunities exist, with grand vistas and animals such as bighorn sheep. Dayhiking, backpacking and hunting are good. Wilderness designation for this area would provide long-term protection for bighorn sheep and other solitude-dependent wildlife. Mining claims do exist just inside the western boundary of this area and in the northern toe. However, it is unlikely that these few claims would have development or production.

The 88,564 acres recommended for uses other than wilderness comprise the east half of the WSA generally below the 3,200 foot contour and the northeastern shoulder of the unit. This acreage is not recommended for wilderness in order to reduce some of the resource conflicts presently occurring and projected to occur within the WSA. This area also offers less than quality wilderness values of solitude and primitive recreational opportunities. These lands generally exhibit lower topographic diversity and lesser wilderness values. The southeastern end is an area of nondescript low hills, susceptible to ORV use. North of this area are the Bunker Hills, an area of moderate and outstanding disturbance at its terminus. Ways associated with this road where it crosses the bajada, portend a future ORV manageability problem. North of the Bunker Hills is a large bajada stretching two-thirds of the length of the WSA nearly to Hackberry Canyon. Wilderness values are mainly moderate and there is concern regarding ORV manageability should access be developed to this region. The lower end of Hackberry Canyon is not recommended for wilderness because it is readily accessible from

Meadow Valley Wash and is frequently used by hunters and the grazing allotment permittee. Along the unit's northeastern corner, the area drained by Vigo Wash has generally low relief and low wilderness values. It is presently crossed by numerous ways and will be difficult to manage without heavy patrol.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The 97,180 acres recommended for wilderness are predominately natural with negligible human imprints except for the upper portions of the Vigo Canyon drainage. The Meadow Valley Mountains are very rugged and little used by man. Occasional vehicle tracks can be found in some of the washes along the west boundary, but are of little consequence. A cherrystem road services an old quarry and oil drill site in the Bunker Hills. Several ways are associated with this road.

The 88,564 acres recommended for nonwilderness do contain several human imprints including a number of ways which run for several miles in the large Vigo Canyon drainage. A corral exists in Hackberry Canyon and several quail guzzles are located near the western boundary of the WSA. This setting does not however, diminish the overall naturalness of the area.

B. Solitude: Within the area recommended for wilderness there are outstanding opportunities for solitude. The Meadow Valley Mountains are rugged and contain numerous small, narrow canyons, cliffs, peaks and rocky outcrops. On the central bajada topographic relief and vegetation are limited, but its vastness contributes to the solitude. Secluded spots are easily obtained in almost any portion of the recommended wilderness area and vistas of uninhabited, virtually empty space enhance the sense of solitude.

Some solitude is obtainable in the Bunker Hills portions not recommended for wilderness but screening is limited due to low hills and shallow washes. In Vigo and Hackberry Canyons, solitude can be readily obtained. Once out of Vigo Canyon and onto the lower relief lands of the upper drainage, solitude is more difficult to obtain because of the influence of the boundary road and the many ways which cross it. In the toe, the narrowness allows a greater influence of outside sights and sounds to impinge on solitude, but vegetative screening is better which compensates somewhat.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The area recommended for wilderness offers outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined recreation experience. The long ridgeline offers numerous peaks, narrow canyons and passes. Sunflower Mountain is a focal point because its location, coloration, and texture contrast markedly with the surrounding terrain. Grapevine Spring on the west side also provides a destination for hikers on the way in or out of the WSA. On the east side, Hackberry and Vigo Canyons are good dayhiking areas.

Numerous loops and through routes are possible for backpackers. Routes mentioned for dayhiking could easily be expanded to longer trips. Climbing and scrambling are available in most of the recommended wilderness area. Limited climbing opportunities are available as well.

There are excellent opportunities for photography of desert bajadas and grand vistas. Bighorn sheep are also present and may present photographic opportunities. The WSA, is large and offers solitude and challenging hikes. It consequently has good opportunities for all types of primitive recreational usage.

4. MANAGEABILITY The 97,180 acres of the WSA recommended for wilderness can reasonably be managed as wilderness to preserve values now present in the area. There is a small area of mining claims on the extreme western periphery of the WSA. These are physically isolated from the WSA proper by virtue of their being on the western escarpment. The area is a solid block of public land with no private inholdings, state lands or right-of-way. Although opportunities exist for ORV travel within the WSA, these opportunities are limited to the major drainage bottoms of the precipitous Wild Cat Wash and Vigo and Hackberry Canyons rocky terrain limits ORV travel in other parts of the WSA.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment for the 97,180 acres of the Meadow Valley WSA recommended for wilderness. The survey was conducted from 1983 through 1986. According to the report, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1729-C, deposits of perlite crop out discontinuously at the base of volcanic slopes throughout the study area. Sand and gravel exist in significant quantities; consisting of alluvial deposits eroded from adjacent bedrock slopes.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 153 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Of those, 150 were written and 3 were oral statements received at the public hearing on the draft EIS. In general 138 commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA. Fourteen commentors supported less wilderness for the Meadow Valley Range WSA.

Most comments which specifically mentioned the WSA touch on high wilderness values (outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation). Comments opposing wilderness centered around the potential mineral resource values and potential mineral exploration development of the WSA.

County: Lincoln County did not respond. The Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning concurred with the recommended wilderness designation contained within the preferred alternative in the Clark Draft EIS.

State: The Governor of Nevada in his consistency letter, dated December 28, 1984, supported the partial alternative with the livestock development of lower Hackberry Canyon left out.

Federal: The U.S. Bureau of Mines suggested a boundary change to exclude the mining claims on the unit's western boundary. The U.S. Air Force would like to place two electronic packages on the main ridgeline even if the area is designated as wilderness and would like to continue use of the region for low level supersonic training. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency observed that the criteria for selecting suitable versus unsuitable wilderness areas for selecting versus unsuitable wilderness areas was unclear in the DEIS. The major reasons can be attributed to mineral resources, management of ORV traffic and aesthetics. EPA recommends a evaluation of the WSA in the proposed action because of the speculative nature of the units mineral resources and the feeling that the ORV use can be somewhat managed. EPA also stated that larger areas should be included in the partial wilderness alternative which area considered manageable. This suggestion is based on the DEIS's description of the WSA's with regard to mineral resources as well as the areas that are not affected by manmade features. Finally EPA states that the FEIS should discuss the recovery of the areas mineral resources in greater detail.